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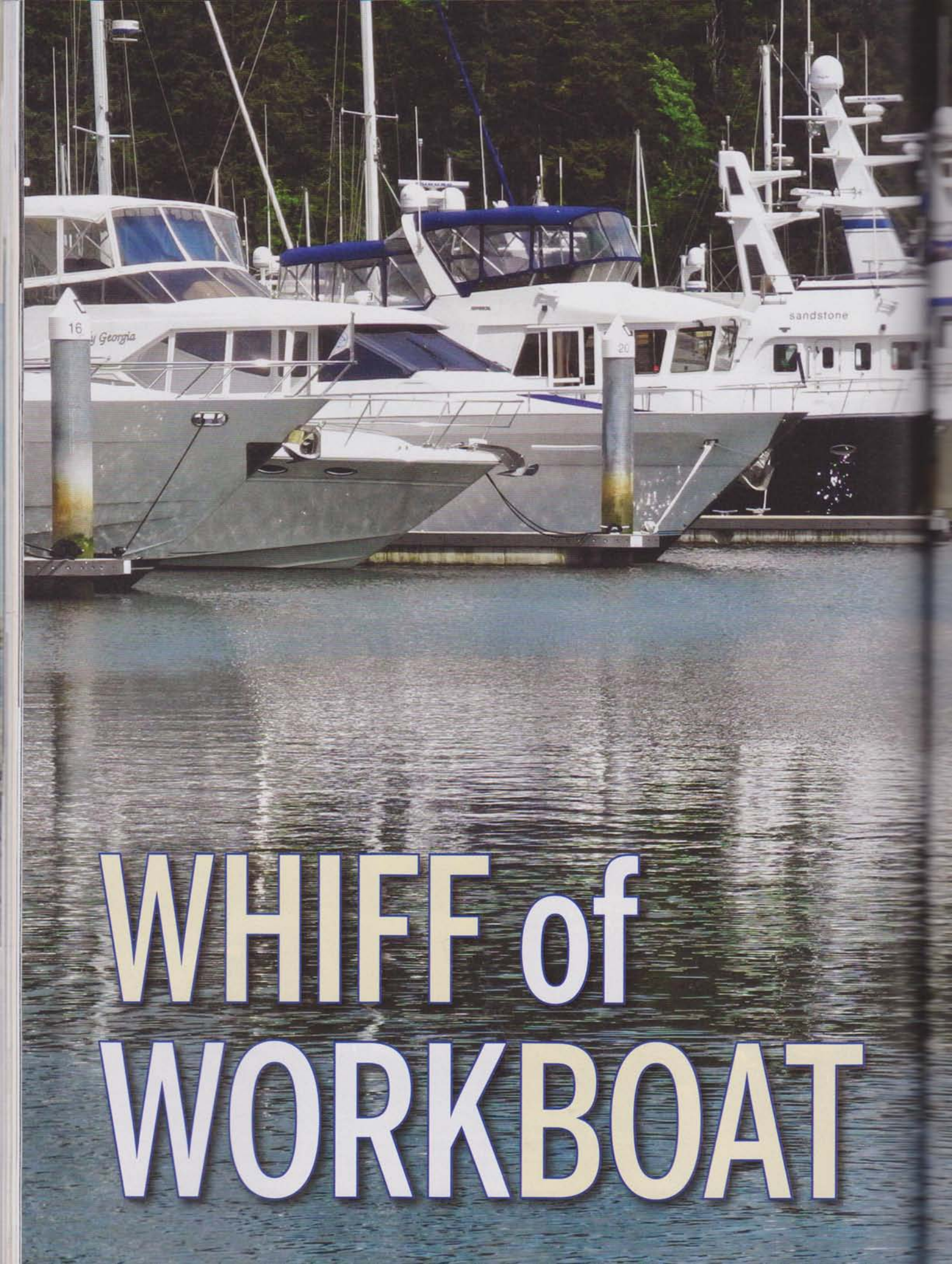
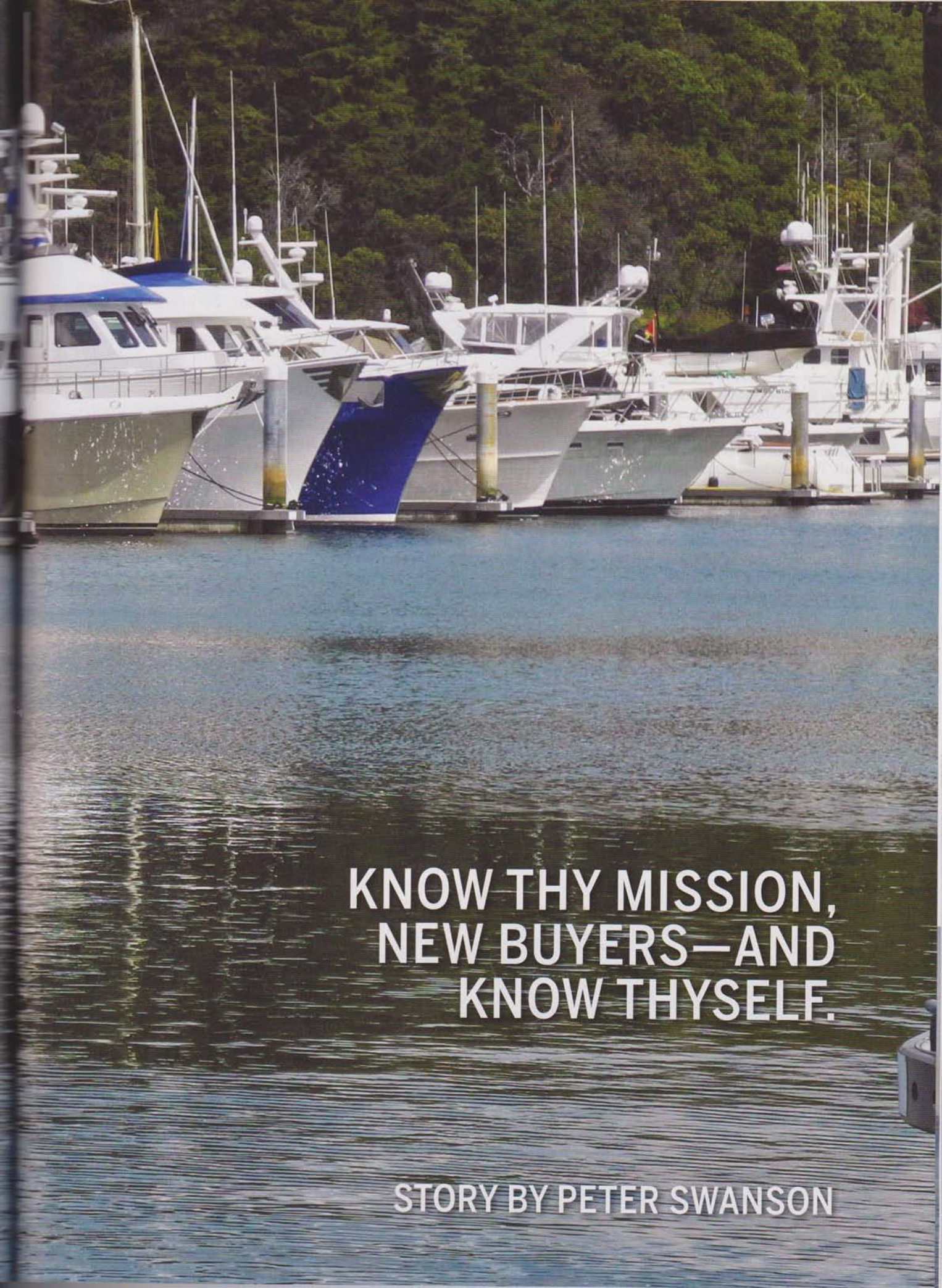


WHIFF of WORKBOAT



KNOW THY MISSION, NEW BUYERS—AND KNOW THYSELF.

STORY BY PETER SWANSON

He owned a big car dealership in the South, inherited from dad. One day over bourbons he imbibed the notion that he and his wife would sail off into the sunset on a big, fat trawler yacht, even though they had never owned a boat before. Once planted, that romantic kernel grew like a tree whose every branch represented a different decision—so many decisions, so many ideas he had never had to consider at the dealership.

At some point, amid discussions about accommodations, choices of interior wood, electronics, hiding places for guns, and all the rest, he and his boatbuilder talked engines. The boatbuilder explained the significance of a full-displacement hull. The boatbuilder may even have mentioned the mathematical formula that determined the boat's maximum practical speed (1.34 multiplied by the square root of a boat's length at the waterline). And the builder surely would have noted the boat's top speed, which was just over 9 knots: "And she wouldn't go any faster if you strapped rockets on her."

Two years later, after using this coastal cruiser for a single season, the man felt cheated and humiliated. His trawler couldn't keep up with the svelte craft operated by his friends, the bosses from other successful enterprises back in the county. Rather than admit his inability to grasp the meaning of "9 knots" when he stroked a check for three quarters of a million dollars, he lashed out at the laws of physics instead. He had the boat re-powered to harness 100 additional horses.

When his rocket strategy failed to achieve liftoff, the buyer sought revenge; after all, he had been cheated. He would put the boatbuilder out of business by winning a judgment against the small company in binding arbitration. He would make the builder pay not just for those new motors but other ill-advised owner modifications and perceived defects in the vessel. Fortunately for the boatbuilder, the buyer had a lawyer who knew nothing about boats, and, even worse, actually believed that his client did.

A retired judge, the arbitrator quickly grasped the concept of full displacement as explained to him by the boatbuilder's naval architect. When the owner of the re-powering shop was called as his star witness against the boatbuilder, he cheerfully testified that the original engines had been the right size for the vessel all along. If a customer wanted bigger motors, he wasn't about to talk them out of it, as long as the result wasn't dangerous. The buyer and his lawyer somehow never saw it coming.

As they say in soccer, own goal! So much for the dealership boss and his day in court, sunk by his own witness.

DEFINING A MOVING TARGET

Seat a group of boatbuilders around a table, and they will trade stories about crazy customers until the beer runs out. With the possible exception of motorcycles, no purchase engages ego and emotion more than boat buying. "A lot of times people pick the wrong wife because they've gone for the 'look' and not the person," says Reuben Trane of Island Pilot Yachts and former builder of the Florida Bay Coaster.

The 42 Grand Banks Europa is probably one of the most elegant interpretations of the workboat aesthetic. The GB look has remained remarkably consistent over the decades.

Above: The Krogen 42 is a popular full-displacement boat, but that means there is a trade-off—long range, yes; speed, no. Below: The American Tug 395 has a turn of speed and a reputation as a great coastal cruiser.

"Quite frankly picking boats can go the same way. You fall in love with a boat, then you buy it, then you figure out you've got the wrong bloody boat. I think we all know that these are emotional decisions."

There are no statistics about how many people buy wrong each year, but you have to wonder whether the track record is worse for first-time buyers and "trawlers." As we define them, "trawlers" are tricky; they can be fast or slow, powered by a single or twins, carry deep or shoal draft, built of fiberglass or steel, cold molded or by stitch and glue. To muddy the waters further, power catamarans are often included in this category as well, since they appeal to the same Baby Boomer demographic of retirees and former sailors.

So ask yourself, what is a trawler? Try to limit your answer to a single sentence, as you could with a canoe, sloop, or center console. Now hold that thought and read on.

Jim Leishman is vice president of Pacific Asian Enterprises, builder of Nordhavn yachts. Leishman says boats like his should be the standard—a trawler is a motorboat with a full-displacement, ballasted hull that is economical enough and with enough range to make long-ocean passages. His gospel is the book *Voyaging Under Power* by the late Robert Beebe, who crossed oceans in his motoryacht *Passagemaker*. By this definition, recreational trawlers would all be ruggedly built, seagoing vessels, such as Nordhavns and other slow boats from builders such as Kadey-Krogen, Selene, Willard, Monk, and Malahide.

THE ICONIC BRAND

Unfortunately for Leishman, the purity of this vision was undermined in the popular imagination years before he and his partners created the Nordhavn brand in the late 1980s. The boating public had already come to associate Grand Banks with the notion of trawler, thanks to the Singapore builder's effective marketing and stubborn adherence to a traditional look.

Grand Banks is one of the most successful boatbuilders in history, having sold more than 1,500 GB 42s between 1965 and 2005. In the early days, buyers were trawler folk, content to steam along close to shore at 10 knots. But by the go-go '80s, Grand Banks was attracting buyers with a need for speed. Boat speed is largely a function of hull design and horsepower, and Grand Banks focused entirely on the latter as it began installing ever more powerful engines. The "sweet spot" for these big-power 42s was a 12-knot cruise, but because of their semi-displacement hull, performance at the higher end meant having to push a lot of water out of the way, an expensive and ultimately unsatisfying proposition.

Seven years ago, Grand Banks got around to working the other half of the speed equation. The company engaged naval architects at Sparkman & Stephens to design the first Grand Banks with a V-shaped hull. Adopting a planing hull was a leap forward in performance without sacrificing the brand's traditional esthetics above the waterline. Today in its marketing, Grand Banks continues to refer to its 20 knot-plus Heritage series as trawlers or "trawler styled." Slow, fast, and faster—no matter how much they changed, GBs somehow continued to be trawlers.

MAGAZINE SHAPES DEBATE

Leishman and other builders credit (or blame) we at *PMM* for today's non-specific definition of trawler. Even though the magazine's founders borrowed the name of Beebe's boat for their masthead, they were loath

to adopt the author's definition. Instead, trawlering was a "lifestyle." "They decided there wasn't enough interest in full-displacement, so I think PassageMaker essentially just broadened the use of that term to include full-planing boats, even catamarans," Leishman said.

Our own John Woodridge, editor-in-chief, does not dispute the role *PMM*'s inclusionary attitude has played over the past 14 years as it framed the trawler debate. Wooldridge agrees that full-displacement boats constitute too small a niche to sustain a magazine. Flip through *PMM* today and you will find slow boats along with many fast boats, including perhaps the fastest trawler of them all. While it boasts economical cruising at 8 knots, the Island Pilot 435 has a top speed of 28. You will also find coverage of powercats such as Leopards, PDQs, and the Maine Cat P47.

Putting aside for a moment magazine-speak about lifestyle, most trawlers share one common denominator in the imagination of the boating public (the exceptions being those pesky catamarans). Regardless of their hull shape below the water, from the edge of their bottom paint up, most trawlers have a 'whiff of workboat' in them. Some evoke the look of early 20th-century fishing boats, some look like shrimpers, some look like lobsterboats, and some resemble tugboats, complete with faux smokestacks. Trane's Island Pilots look like pilot boats. The Nordhavn 62 and its new 63 look like scaled-down freighters.

Marine industry people interviewed for this article agreed that nowadays "trawler" is a look. Otherwise, as Jim Leishman of Nordhavn quipped, what's to stop a zoomie, Euro-styled bubble boat from being another fast trawler? A trawler's styling is never Euro, even if it's built in Europe by the likes of Beneteau.

Ben Wilde has been selling Nordic Tugs from his Essex, Connecticut dealership since 2000; his line has recently expanded to include the trailerable Ranger Tug. Nordic Tugs are moderately fast coastal cruisers with a semi-displacement hull. No one likes to turn away a sale, but Wilde (like Leishman, Trane, and other reputable boatbuilders) says he sometimes finds himself advising a prospective buyer to look elsewhere for a better fit.

Wilde recalls asking a man at the boat show why he looked so happy. "I bought a boat, he says. What did you

Top: The Island Pilot designs are the fleetest of foot, with speeds at WOT approaching 30 knots. Island Pilots take their looks from the vessels that deliver pilots to the big ships they guide into our harbors. Above: Power cats fit into the "trawler" niche almost by default, and few do it better, while retaining a traditional look, than the Maine Cat P47.

get? A Mainship 43. What are you going to do with it? He says, I want to do every island in the Caribbean, and then I'm going to go through the Panama Canal, and I'm going out to Hawaii. I said, you're not going to like me for this, but you bought the wrong boat. Did you really tell the salesman what you were going to do with this boat?"

STICK TO THE MISSION

Lou Codega is a naval architect with a wide-range of motor vessels in his portfolio, including the Great Harbour line of full-displacement coastal cruisers. Codega, Trane, and others interviewed for this article suggested that every boat-buying project begins with a mission statement.

"Make a list of how you're going to use the boat," Codega says. "List your typical trips. Here's what I want to do: I want to leave on a Friday, go out, and come back on a Monday. That might be one scenario. The other is that I have a week off from work and I want to take off, travel so much distance, and run six hours a day. That's another scenario. Then you can prioritize that list. Here's what I am going to do a lot, so that's important to me. Crossing the Atlantic? I'd like to think about it, but it's probably not going to happen.

"Once you have what you want to do and how you want to do it, then you can say these are the boat characteristics I need to make that happen—how much speed and range, accommodations, and all that. Think what you want to do first, then think about the boat to do it in. To some extent that takes the what-a-good-looking-boat thing out of the process. It gets rid of the knee-jerk buying."

John Love of Norwalk, Connecticut, is a retired ship operator that likes to cruise the New England coast slowly and burning as little fuel as possible. Slow-speed economy was so important to Love that he convinced Grand Banks to dust off its molds for a single 420hp engine, rather then buy a boat with the standard twin-screw configuration. "People really questioned my sanity when I went for a single engine," Love says.

What does Love say to the boat buyers who want to go a little faster, whether it be Nordic Tug fast, Grand Banks faster, or Island Pilot very fast? "The key for the trawler person is to think of proper engine operation at the low end, not the high end. If you are truly interested in a trawler—or let's call it the trawler lifestyle—you're going to be operating much more in the low end rather than the high end," he says.

And with that we scrawl a contemporary definition of "trawler" on our cocktail napkin: A trawler is a recreational vessel reminiscent of a workboat above the waterline, which appeals to buyers wanting to cruise at slow speeds, at least part of the time.

KNOW THYSELF

For a buyer, choosing a boat by starting out with a blank slate (like the car dealer at the beginning of this story) the logical way begins with a mission statement. And, however he or she organizes the buying process, it should be informed with basic reality checks and points of personal insight.

Our car dealer bought the wrong boat, not just because he failed to fully grasp the science behind his vessel, but because he lacked personal insight. He should have known he wasn't a slow-boat guy, for one thing. For another, arriving last at the marina meant his friends in faster boats had arrived before him and would be waiting to enjoy the spectacle of a guy new to boating, blundering around trying to dock such a big vessel. As Nordic Tugs dealer Ben Wilde says, too many people buy boats that are too big, so they never leave the dock. "They're too intimidated to use them, so they never take them out," Wilde says. "Eventually they sell the boat and get out of boating, and we all lose."

The late cruising guide author, "Skipper Bob" Reib, used to advise prospective trawler buyers to choose the smallest boat on which they could cruise comfortably, not the biggest boat they could afford. If you accept the adage that people have the most fun on the smallest boat they ever owned, you might also accept, conversely, that people have the least fun on their biggest boat.

There is also a case for simplicity. Unless you are the type of person that enjoys fiddling with mechanical and electrical systems at the expense of seeing the world, insist that your boatbuilder keep it simple. Generally, the more electricity needed for daily life on a boat under way, the more complicated the systems need to be. Too often, when power cruisers get together, the conversation is dominated by talk of failing pumps and new-fangled inverters, not the interesting places they have visited. At the risk of visiting heresy to these pages, sailors are not nearly as guilty of this.

The shippiest trawler of all times may well be the Nordhavn 62. Beginning in 1993, 38 N62s have been sold to ocean-roamers.

Finally, so much of what has been written about boat buying here and elsewhere assumes everyone has the money for a new purchase. One hopes that most of us would rather be on the water on a boat that is merely good, instead of confined to shore for want of cash, with the formula for that perfect boat locked in our imaginations. Maybe the best advice of all is to buy the best "trawler" you can afford and learn to love her for what she is.